

PCRAM MEMORY CELL AND METHOD OF MAKING SAME

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"EXPRESS MAIL" MAILING LABEL

Number: EL 652 336 196 US

Date of Deposit: May 11, 2001

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field Of The Invention

The invention relates generally to the field of semiconductor devices and fabrication and, more particularly, to memory elements and methods for making memory elements.

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2. Background Of The Related Art

This section is intended to introduce the reader to various aspects of art which may be related to various aspects of the present invention that are described and/or claimed below. This discussion is believed to be helpful in providing the reader with background information to facilitate a better understanding of the various aspects of the present invention. Accordingly, it should be understood that these statements are to be read in this light, and not as admissions of prior art.

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Microprocessor-controlled integrated circuits are used in a wide variety of applications. Such applications include personal computers, vehicle control systems, telephone networks, and a host of consumer products. As is well known, microprocessors are essentially generic devices that perform specific functions under the control of a software program. This program is stored in one or more memory devices that are coupled to the microprocessor. Not only does the microprocessor access memory devices to retrieve the program instructions, but it also stores and retrieves data created during execution of the program in one or more memory devices.

There are a variety of different memory devices available for use in microprocessor-based systems. The type of memory device chosen for a specific function within a microprocessor-based system depends largely upon what features of the memory are best suited to perform the particular function. For instance, volatile memories, such as dynamic random access memories (DRAMs), must be continually powered in order to retain their contents, but they tend to provide greater storage capability and programming options and cycles than non-volatile memories, such as read only memories (ROMs). While non-volatile memories that permit limited reprogramming exist, such as electrically erasable and programmable "ROMs," all true random access memories, i.e., those memories capable of 10^{14} programming cycles are more, are volatile memories. Although one time programmable read only memories and moderately reprogrammable memories serve many useful applications, a true nonvolatile random access memory (NVRAM) would likely be needed to surpass volatile memories in usefulness.

Efforts have been underway to create a commercially viable memory device that is both random access and nonvolatile using structure changing memory elements, as opposed to the charge storage memory elements used in most commercial memory devices. The use of electrically writable and erasable phase change materials, i.e., materials which can be electrically switched between generally amorphous and generally crystalline states or between different resistive states while in crystalline form, in memory applications is known in the art and is disclosed, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 5,296,716 to Ovshinsky et al. The Ovshinsky patent contains a discussion of the general theory of operation of chalcogenide materials, which are a particular type of structure changing material.

As disclosed in the Ovshinsky patent, such phase change materials can be electrically switched between a first structural state, in which the material is generally amorphous, and a second structural state, in which the material has a generally crystalline local order. The material may also be electrically switched between different detectable states of local order across the entire spectrum between the completely amorphous and the completely crystalline states. In other words, the switching of such materials is not required to take place in a binary fashion between completely amorphous and completely crystalline states. Rather, the material may be switched in incremental steps reflecting changes of local order to provide a "gray scale" represented by a multiplicity of conditions of local order spanning the spectrum from the completely amorphous state to the completely crystalline state.

These memory elements are monolithic, homogeneous, and formed of chalcogenide material typically selected from the group of Te, Se, Sb, Ni, and Ge. This chalcogenide material exhibits different electrical characteristics depending upon its state. For instance, in its amorphous state the material exhibits a higher resistivity than it does in its crystalline state. Such chalcogenide materials may be switched between numerous electrically detectable conditions of varying resistivity in nanosecond time periods with the input of picojoules of energy. The resulting memory element is truly non-volatile. It will maintain the integrity of the information stored by the memory cell without the need for periodic refresh signals, and the data integrity of the information stored by these memory cells is not lost when power is removed from the device. The memory material is also directly overwritable so that the memory cells need not be erased, i.e., set to a specified starting point, in order to change information stored within the memory cells. Finally, the large dynamic range offered by the memory material theoretically provides for

the gray scale storage of multiple bits of binary information in a single cell by mimicking the binary encoded information in analog form and, thereby, storing multiple bits of binary encoded information as a single resistance value in a single cell.

5 Traditionally, the operation of chalcogenide memory cells requires that a region of the chalcogenide memory material, called the “active region,” be subjected to a current pulse to change the crystalline state of the chalcogenide material within the active region. Typically, a current density of between about 10^5 and 10^7 amperes/cm² is needed. To obtain this current density in a commercially viable device having at least one million memory cells, for instance, one theory suggests that the active region of each memory cell should be made as small as possible to minimize the total current drawn by the memory device.

10 However, such traditional chalcogenide memory cells have evolved into what is referred to as a programmable metallization cell or a plated chalcogenide memory cell for use in a plated chalcogenide random access memory (PCRAM) device. Such a cell includes a chalcogenide material between opposing electrodes. A fast ion conductor material is incorporated into the chalcogenide material. The resistance of such material can be changed between highly resistive and highly conductive states.

20 To perform a write operation with the memory cell in its normal high resistive state, a voltage potential is applied to a certain one of the electrodes, with the other of the electrode being held at zero voltage or ground. The electrode having the voltage applied to it functions as an anode, while the electrode held at zero or ground functions as a cathode. The nature of the fast

ion conductor material is such that it undergoes a chemical and structural change at a certain applied voltage level. Specifically, at some suitable threshold voltage, the metal ions within the chalcogenide material begin to plate on the cathode and progress through the chalcogenide material toward the anode. The process continues until a conductive dendrite or filament extends
5 between the electrodes, effectively interconnecting the top and bottom electrodes to create an electrical short circuit.

Once this occurs, dendrite growth stops, and the dendrite is retained when the voltage potentials are removed. This results in the resistance of the chalcogenide material between the electrodes dropping by a factor of about 1,000. The material can be returned to its highly resistive state by reversing the voltage potential between the anode and cathode to cause the dendrite to disappear. Again, the highly resistive state is maintained when the reverse voltage potential is removed. Accordingly, such a device can, for example, function as a reprogrammable memory cell of non-volatile random access memory circuit.

As mentioned above, the variable resistance material disposed between the electrodes typically is a chalcogenide material having metal ions diffused therein. A specific example is germanium selenide with silver ions. Typically, to provide the silver ions within the germanium selenide material, germanium selenide is deposited onto the first electrode using chemical vapor
20 deposition. A thin layer of silver is then deposited on the glass, for example by physical vapor deposition or another technique. The layer of silver is then irradiated with ultraviolet radiation. The thin nature of the deposited silver allows the energy to pass through the silver to the silver/glass interface to cause the silver to diffuse into the chalcogenide material. The applied

energy and overlying silver result in the silver migrating into the glass layer such that a homegenous distribution of silver throughout the layer is ultimately achieved.

Unfortunately, chalcogenide materials are relatively delicate. The nature of the deposition technique used to deposit the silver can damage the chalcogenide material and, thus, adversely affect the resulting memory cell. Furthermore, it can be challenging to etch and polish chalcogenide materials. Accordingly, it would be desirable to develop memory cell fabrication methods that avoid steps that can damage such materials.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing and other advantages of the invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon reference to the drawings in which:

5 Fig. 1 illustrates a block diagram of an exemplary processor-based device;

 Fig. 2 illustrates an exemplary memory device;

10 Fig. 3 illustrates a more detailed view of the memory array of the memory device
illustrated in FIG. 2;

15 Figs. 4-10 illustrate cross-sectional views of a memory cell during different stages of
fabrication;

 Figs. 11-15 illustrate cross-sectional views of an alternate embodiment of a memory cell
during different stages of fabrication; and

 Figs. 16-19 illustrate cross-sectional views of another alternate embodiment of a memory
cell during different stages of fabrication.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

Specific embodiments of microprocessor-based systems, memories, memory elements, and methods of making such memory elements are described below as they might be implemented for use in semiconductor memory circuits. In the interest of clarity, not all features of an actual implementation are described in this specification. It should be appreciated that in the development of any such actual implementation, as in any engineering project, numerous implementation-specific decisions must be made to achieve the developers' specific goals, such as compliance with system-related and business-related constraints, which may vary from one implementation to another. Moreover, it should be appreciated that such a development effort might be complex and time-consuming, but would nevertheless be a routine undertaking for those of ordinary skill having the benefit of this disclosure.

Turning now to the drawings, and referring initially to Fig. 1, a block diagram depicting an exemplary processor-based device, generally designated by the reference numeral 10, is illustrated. The device 10 may be any of a variety of different types, such as a computer, pager, cellular telephone, personal organizer, control circuit, etc. In a typical processor-based device, one or more processors 12, such as a microprocessor(s), control many of the functions of the device 10.

The device 10 typically includes a power supply 14. For instance, if the device 10 is portable, the power supply 14 would advantageously include permanent batteries, replaceable batteries, and/or rechargeable batteries. The power supply 14 may also include an A/C adapter, so that the device may be plugged into a wall outlet, for instance. In fact, the power supply 14

may also include a D/C adapter, so that the device 10 may be plugged into a vehicle's cigarette lighter, for instance.

Various other devices may be coupled to the processor(s) 12, depending upon the functions that the device 10 performs. For instance, a user interface 16 may be coupled to the processor(s) 12. The user interface 16 may include an input device, such as buttons, switches, a keyboard, a light pin, a mouse, and/or a voice recognition system, for instance. A display 18 may also be coupled to the processor(s) 12. The display 18 may include an LCD display, a CRT, LEDs, and/or an audio display. Furthermore, an RF subsystem/baseband processor 20 may also be coupled to the processor(s) 12. The RF subsystem/baseband processor 20 may include an antenna that is coupled to an RF receiver and to an RF transmitter (not shown). A communication port 22 may also be coupled to the processor(s) 12. The communication port 22 may be adapted to be coupled to a peripheral device 24, such as a modem, a printer, or a computer, for instance, or to a network, such as a local area network or the Internet.

Because the processor(s) 12 controls the functioning of the device 10 generally under the control of software programming, memory is coupled to the processor(s) 12 to store and facilitate execution of the software program. For instance, the processor(s) 12 may be coupled to volatile memory 26, which may include dynamic random access memory (DRAM), static random access memory (SRAM), Double Data Rate (DDR) memory, etc. The processor(s) 12 may also be coupled to non-volatile memory 28. The non-volatile memory 28 may include a read only memory (ROM), such as an EPROM or Flash Memory, to be used in conjunction with the volatile memory. The size of the ROM is typically selected to be just large enough to store any

necessary operating system, application programs, and fixed data. The volatile memory, on the other hand, is typically quite large so that it can store dynamically loaded applications. Additionally, the non-volatile memory 28 may include a high capacity memory such as a disk drive, tape drive memory, CD ROM drive, DVD, read/write CD ROM drive, and/or a floppy disk drive.

An exemplary memory device is illustrated in Fig. 2 and generally designated by a reference numeral 30. The memory device 30 is an integrated circuit memory that is advantageously formed on a semiconductor substrate 32. The memory device 30 includes a memory matrix or array 34 that includes a plurality of memory cells for storing data, as described below. The memory matrix 34 is coupled to periphery circuitry 36 by the plurality of control lines 38. The periphery circuitry 36 may include circuitry for addressing the memory cells contained within the memory matrix 34, along with circuitry for storing data in and retrieving data from the memory cells. The periphery circuitry 36 may also include other circuitry used for controlling or otherwise insuring the proper functioning of the memory device 30.

A more detailed depiction of the memory matrix 34 is illustrated in Fig. 3. As can be seen, the memory matrix 34 includes a plurality of memory cells 40 that are arranged in generally perpendicular rows and columns. The memory cells 40 in each row are coupled together by a respective word line 42, and the memory cells 40 in each column are coupled together by a respective digit line 44. Specifically, each memory cell 40 includes a word line node 46 that is coupled to a respective word line 42, and each memory cell 40 includes a digit line node 48 that is coupled to a respective digit line 44. The conductive word lines 42 and digit

lines 44 are collectively referred to as address lines. These address lines are electrically coupled to the periphery circuitry 36 so that each of the memory cells 40 can be accessed for the storage and retrieval of information.

Turning now to Figs. 4-10, a first exemplary embodiment of a memory cell 40 will be described. Fig. 10 illustrates the finished memory cell 40A, and Figs. 4-9 illustrate the memory cell 40A at various stages of fabrication. The suffix "A" is used in describing this first embodiment for clarity so that similar reference numerals may be used to describe subsequent embodiments. As illustrated in Fig. 10, the finished memory cell 40A includes a word line 42A, which is often referred to as a Metal 1 (M1) layer. The word line 42A has a layer of conductive material 50A, such as silver (Ag), disposed thereon. A layer of chalcogenide material 52A, such as germanium selenide (GeSe), having metal ions diffused therein is disposed over the conductive layer 50A. The metal ions diffused in the chalcogenide material 52A typically originate in the layer of conductive material 50A. The digit line 44A, often referred to as a Metal 2 (M2) layer, is disposed over the chalcogenide layer 52A. Each memory cell 40A is typically isolated from adjacent memory cells by oxide regions 54A, and each memory cell 40A is typically fabricated on a substrate 56A.

One method of fabricating the memory cell 40A is disclosed with reference to the various stages of fabrication illustrated in Figs. 4-9. Referring first to Fig. 4, a substrate 56A is typically used as a base upon which the memory cells 40A of the memory array 44 are formed. In this discussion, the substrate 56A is generally used in a generic sense, because it is possible for the substrate 56A to take various forms depending upon the nature of the circuit design. For

example, the substrate 56A may be a suitable semiconductor substrate, such as silicon or gallium arsenide, or a suitable dielectric substrate, such as PECVD silicon dioxide. Furthermore, the substrate 56A may include layers, devices, and/or structures upon which or around which the memory cells 40A may be fabricated.

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A layer of dielectric material 54A, for example an oxide such as silicon dioxide, is formed over the substrate 56A, as illustrated in Fig. 5. The layer of dielectric material 54A may be formed by any suitable process, such as by chemical vapor deposition. A window 58A is formed in the layer of dielectric material 54A. The window may extend partially through the layer of dielectric material 54A, or completely through the layer of dielectric material 54A to the substrate 56A, as illustrated in Fig. 5. The window 58A may be formed by any suitable process, such as by the use of standard photolithographic techniques.

As illustrated in Figs. 5 and 6, a layer of conductive material is deposited into the window 58A and planarized to form the word line 42A. Again, any suitable deposition technique, such as sputtering, and any suitable planarization technique, such as chemical mechanical planarization (CMP), may be used. The conductive material used to form the word line 42A is typically a metal, such as copper, tungsten, nickel, or aluminum. Although the word line 42A is illustrated as being formed in a dielectric material 54A in this embodiment, it should be appreciated that the word line 42A may be formed in other manners as well. For example, the word line 42A may be buried in the substrate 56A.

A fast ion conductive material is then disposed on the word line 42A. The fast ion conductive material is selected to cooperate with a subsequently applied layer of chalcogenide material to form the memory element of the memory cell 40A. In this embodiment, the word line 42A is plated with the conductive material 50A using an immersion plating process. In general, immersion plating replaces a less noble metal with a more noble metal. It is an ion exchange process that requires neither external electricity nor a catalyst. Immersion plating can be used in a self-limiting process, and it usually plates thinner films than other plating methods. Immersion plating depends on the base metal, i.e., the less noble metal. Many factors can influence immersion plating, such as the type of ligand used to take up the base metal and to keep the base metal in solution.

In this exemplary embodiment, the base metal of the word line 42A is selected to be copper, and the more noble metal of the conductive layer 50A is selected to be silver. Of course, it should be recognized that other base metals, such as nickel, aluminum, or tungsten, for example, may be used in place of copper, and that alloys of such metals may be used as well. In addition, various "more noble" metals, such as gold, may be used in place of silver. However, for the purposes of this exemplary embodiment utilizing copper and silver, a silver immersion solution called "argentomerse" available from Technic, Inc. may be used. This silver immersion solution utilizes a cyanide salt chemistry, which essentially represents a general purpose immersion plating solution. A silver immersion solution such as argentomerse should suffice for plating silver on base metals such as nickel or copper. However, for immersion plating of silver on tungsten, it may be desirable to utilize another silver immersion solution in order to optimize the chemistry. The structure illustrated in Fig. 6 is immersed in the silver immersion solution for

a sufficient amount of time to form the layer of conductive material 50A. For example, the structure may be immersed in the solution for 15 to 30 minutes to form the conductive layer 50A having a thickness of 500A to 2000A.

5 After the conductive layer 50A has been formed on the word line 42A, a layer of chalcogenide material 52A, such as germanium selenide, may be formed over the conductive layer 50A, as illustrated in Fig. 8. The layer of chalcogenide material 52A may be formed by any suitable process, such as chemical vapor deposition. The layer of chalcogenide material 52A may have a thickness in the range of 200A to 800A, for example.

10 Once the layer of chalcogenide material 52A is formed over the layer of conductive material 50A, the structure illustrated in Fig. 8 is processed in a manner that causes at least a portion of the material in the conductive layer 50A to migrate into the layer of chalcogenide material 52A. In this embodiment, the structure illustrated in Fig. 8 is subjected to ultraviolet radiation and heat to cause silver atoms in the layer of conductive material 50A to migrate into the layer of chalcogenide material 52A. For example, the structure in Fig. 8 may be submitted to ultraviolet radiation in the range of 160 nm to 904 nm, e.g., 405 nm, at an intensity of 10 microjoules to 10 millijoules for a period of 5 to 30 minutes, and heat at a temperature of 50 to 85 degrees Celsius for a period of 5 to 20 minutes. Typically, the heat cycle is performed first, followed by the UV cycle.

20 After this conversion process, the layer of chalcogenide material 52A has metal ions in it, as illustrated in Fig. 9. Then, the Metal 2 (M2) layer, which forms the digit line 44A, may be

disposed over the layer of chalcogenide material 52A, as illustrated in Fig. 10, to complete the memory cell 40A.

It should be appreciated from the discussion of the structure and method of fabrication of the memory cell 40A that it represents an inverted PCRAM memory cell. As discussed previously, a typical PCRAM memory cell is fabricated by forming a layer of chalcogenide material on the Metal 1 layer, thus requiring the conductive layer, such as silver, to be disposed on the chalcogenide layer. However, because chalcogenide is a very delicate material as discussed previously, known methods of depositing silver on chalcogenide are difficult to control in a reliable and repeatable fashion. However, by inverting the traditional PCRAM memory cell so that the conductive layer, such as silver, is disposed on the Metal 1 layer, the delicate nature of the subsequently deposited chalcogenide material does not pose a problem.

Figs. 11-15 illustrate a second embodiment of the memory cell 40. Fig. 15 illustrates the finished memory cell 40B, and Figs. 11-14 illustrate the memory cell 40B at various stages of fabrication. The suffix "B" is used in describing this second embodiment for clarity so that similar reference numerals may be used. As illustrated in Fig. 15, the finished memory cell 40B includes a word line 42B, which is again referred to as a Metal 1 (M1) layer. The word line 42B has a layer of conductive material 50B, such as silver (Ag), disposed thereon. A layer of chalcogenide material 52B, such as germanium selenide (GeSe), having metal ions diffused therein is disposed over the conductive layer 50B. Unlike the first embodiment, the layer of conductive material 50B and the layer of chalcogenide material 52B are disposed in a window created in a layer of dielectric material 60B. The digit line 44B, again referred to as a Metal 2

(M2) layer, is disposed over the chalcogenide layer 52B. Each memory cell 40B is typically isolated from adjacent memory cells by oxide regions 54B, and each memory cell 40B is typically fabricated on a substrate 56B.

One method of fabricating the memory cell 40B is disclosed with reference to the various stages of fabrication illustrated in Figs. 11-14. However, before discussing Figs. 11-14, it should be understood that the memory cell 40B first undergoes the stages of fabrication illustrated in Figs. 4-6. Then, as illustrated in Fig. 11, a layer of dielectric material 60B is deposited over the structure, and a window 62 is formed in the layer of dielectric material 60B to expose at least a portion of the underlying word line 42B. The layer of dielectric material 60B may be deposited in any suitable manner, such as by chemical vapor deposition, and it may include any suitable dielectric, such as silicon nitride. The thickness of the layer of dielectric material 60B may be in the range of 200A to 1000A, for example.

A fast ion conductive material is then disposed on the portion of the word line 42B exposed by the window 62. The selection of the fast ion conductive material and the manner in which it may be applied does not differ from the previous embodiment. Accordingly, for the sake of clarity, in this exemplary embodiment, the base metal of the word line 42B is selected to be copper, and the more noble metal of the conductive layer 50B is selected to be silver. The structure illustrated in Fig. 11 is immersed in the silver immersion solution for a sufficient amount of time to form the layer of conductive material 50B, as illustrated in Fig. 12.

After the conductive layer 50B has been formed on the word line 42B, a layer of chalcogenide material 52B, such as germanium selenide, may be deposited in the window 62 over the conductive layer 50B, as illustrated in Fig. 13. The layer of chalcogenide material 52B may be formed by any suitable process, such as chemical vapor deposition. The deposited layer of chalcogenide material 52B is then planarized, by chemical mechanical planarization for example, so that the layer of chalcogenide material 52B remains only within the window 62. Thus, the thickness of the layer of chalcogenide material 52B is approximately the same as the thickness of the layer of dielectric material 60B.

Once the layer of chalcogenide material 52B is formed in the window 62, the structure illustrated in Fig. 13 is processed in a manner that causes at least a portion of the material in the conductive layer 50B to migrate into the layer of chalcogenide material 52B. As in the previous embodiment, the structure illustrated in Fig. 13 is subjected to ultraviolet radiation and heat to cause silver atoms in the layer of conductive material 50B to migrate into the layer of chalcogenide material 52B.

After this conversion process, the layer of chalcogenide material 52B has metal ions in it, as illustrated in Fig. 14. Then, the Metal 2 (M2) layer, which forms the digit line 44B, may be disposed over the layer of dielectric material 60B and over the layer of chalcogenide material 52B, as illustrated in Fig. 15, to complete the memory cell 40B.

Figs. 16-19 illustrate a third embodiment of the memory cell 40. Fig. 19 illustrates the finished memory cell 40C, and Figs. 16-18 illustrate the memory cell 40C at various stages of

fabrication. The suffix "C" is used in describing this third embodiment for clarity so that similar reference numerals may be used. As illustrated in Fig. 19, the finished memory cell 40C includes a word line 42C, which is again referred to as a Metal 1 (M1) layer. The word line 42C has a layer of conductive material 50C, such as silver (Ag), disposed thereon. A layer of chalcogenide material 52C, such as germanium selenide (GeSe), having metal ions diffused therein is disposed over the conductive layer 50C. Unlike the previous embodiments, the layer of conductive material 50C and the layer of chalcogenide material 52C are disposed in a window created in a layer of dielectric material 60C and in a layer of conductive material 44'C. The layer of conductive material 44'C forms a portion of the digit line and is again referred to as a Metal 2 (M2) layer. The other portion of the digit line is formed by a layer of conductive material 44''C, which is disposed over the chalcogenide layer 52C and over the Metal 2 layer. The layer of conductive material 44''C is referred to as the Metal 3 (M3) layer. Each memory cell 40C is typically isolated from adjacent memory cells by oxide regions 54C, and each memory cell 40C is typically fabricated on a substrate 56C.

One method of fabricating the memory cell 40C is disclosed with reference to the various stages of fabrication illustrated in Figs. 16-18. However, before discussing Figs. 16-18, it should be understood that the memory cell 40C first undergoes the stages of fabrication illustrated in Figs. 4-6. Then, as illustrated in Fig. 16, a layer of dielectric material 60C is deposited over the structure, and a layer of conductive material 44'C (the Metal 2 layer) is deposited over the layer of dielectric material 60C. The layer of dielectric material 60C may be deposited in any suitable manner, such as by chemical vapor deposition, and it may include any suitable dielectric, such as silicon nitride. The layer of conductive material 44'C may be deposited in any suitable manner,

such as by sputtering, and it may include any suitable conductive material, such as platinum, aluminum, or tungsten. The thickness of the layer of dielectric material 60C may be in the range of 200A to 1000A, for example, and the thickness of the layer of conductive material 44'C may be in the range of 500A to 2000A, for example.

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A window 64 is formed in the layer of dielectric material 60C and in the layer of conductive material 44'C to expose at least a portion of the underlying word line 42C. The window 64 may be formed in any suitable manner, such as by the use of standard photolithographic techniques.

A fast ion conductive material is then disposed on the portion of the word line 42C exposed by the window 64. The selection of the fast ion conductive material and the manner in which it may be applied does not differ from the previous embodiments. Accordingly, for the sake of clarity, in this exemplary embodiment, the base metal of the word line 42C is selected to be copper, and the more noble metal of the conductive layer 50C is selected to be silver. The structure illustrated in Fig. 16 is immersed in the silver immersion solution for a sufficient amount of time to form the layer of conductive material 50C, as illustrated in Fig. 17.

After the conductive layer 50C has been formed on the word line 42C, a layer of chalcogenide material 52C, such as germanium selenide, may be deposited in the window 64 over the conductive layer 50C, as illustrated in Fig. 18. The layer of chalcogenide material 52C may be formed by any suitable process, such as chemical vapor deposition. The deposited layer of chalcogenide material 52C is then planarized, by chemical mechanical planarization for

example, so that the layer of chalcogenide material 52C remains only within the window 64.

Thus, the thickness of the layer of chalcogenide material 52C is approximately the same as the thickness of the layers of dielectric material 60C and conductive material 44'C.

5 Once the layer of chalcogenide material 52C is formed in the window 64, the structure illustrated in Fig. 18 is processed in a manner that causes at least a portion of the material in the conductive layer 50C to migrate into the layer of chalcogenide material 52C. As in the previous embodiments, the structure illustrated in Fig. 18 is subjected to ultraviolet radiation and heat to cause silver atoms in the layer of conductive material 50C to migrate into the layer of
10 chalcogenide material 52C.

After this conversion process, the layer of chalcogenide material 52C has metal ions in it, as illustrated in Fig. 19. Then, a layer of conductive material 44''C (the Metal 3 layer), which forms the remainder of the digit line, may be disposed over the layer of conductive material 44'C and over the layer of chalcogenide material 52C to complete the memory cell 40C.

As previously mention, chalcogenide material is somewhat susceptible to damage from planarization techniques, such as chemical mechanical planarization. However, it should be noted that the memory cell 40C is relatively immune to any "over planarization" of the
20 chalcogenide material 52C within the window 64. Although the planarization step can remove some of the relatively delicate chalcogenide material 52C from the top of the window 64, the electrical path from the digit line 44C through the chalcogenide material 52C typically does not extend directly from the layer of conductive material 44''C. Rather, the shortest path typically

extends from the edge of the layer of conductive material 44'C. Thus, for over planarization to affect the memory cell 40C adversely, chalcogenide material 52C below the level of the dielectric layer 60C would have to be removed. Since over planarization to such an extent is unlikely, the memory cell 40C typically provides for relatively repeatable and consistent memory operation.

While the invention may be susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments have been shown by way of example in the drawings and have been described in detail herein. However, it should be understood that the invention is not intended to be limited to the particular forms disclosed. Rather, the invention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the following appended claims.